# INTERSECTION OF HUMAN RELATIONS AND ECONOMIC MELTDOWN: A STUDY OF SELECT BRITISH AND AMERICAN CRUNCH FICTION

Synopsis

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## INTERSECTION OF HUMAN RELATIONS AND ECONOMIC MELTDOWN: A STUDY OF SELECT BRITISH AND AMERICAN CRUNCH FICTION

**Introduction:**

The world of finance has long been a source of fascination for writers, and this is intensely evident in the wake of the credit crunch. Since 2007 till date globe has been undergoing financial crisis. Modern British and American writers have developed a contemporary genre to represent a new millennial crisis of credit and to implicate its legacy for contemporary society. The fiction of John Lanchester, Sebastian Faulks, Robert Harris, Adam Haslett, Paula Hawkins and Sabin Willett highlights the interconnected state of finance and society during and after the credit crunch. The narratives of these writers deal with finance, underlining human relationship with the fluxes in the world of finance. Crunch fiction writers offer critical and alternative standpoints on the financialization of society in the new millennium. Their works have not received deserving attention in Indian academic world. Their writings also make a significant contribution to the body of new millennial fiction and Culture Studies. This proposed research is an attempt to examine closely the variations and depression in financial world that influence human relationships in the selected novels of four crunch fiction writers–John Lanchester, Sebastian Faulks, Robert Harris, Adam Haslett, Paula Hawkins and Sabin Willett.

Crunch Fiction highlights personal, financial and social spaces and it engulfs identity, gender and ethnicity. Financial crunch and crisis in finance capital are reflected in cultural expressions such as fiction, poetry, drama and films. Every social order brings certain spatial restrictions upon human beings who respond to these restrictions by exploring alternate spaces – be it imaginative or geographical. Social realities such as market, money, location, dislocation and shift in social class membership complicate the issues of space and identity further, in the context of a crunch. Since finance and capital are directly linked with space and place an individual enjoys in a society, it becomes an interesting engagement to analyse the spatial orders and spatial constructions in crunch fiction. Do people explore non-places in crunch time? Do they invent alternate spaces in such a time? These are few questions addressed in this study. The post 9/11 fiction in the US and the UK holds some of the answers to these questions.

Crunch writers such as John Lanchester, Sebastian Faulks, Robert Harris, Paula Hawkins, Sabin Willett and Adam Haslett represent contemporary Western man's

engagements with family, society, finance, market, identity, space, sexuality, location, and dislocation. Their novels address all these complex thematic formulations and their characters wade through the socio-economic realities to define the boundaries of social hierarchy, social class, savers, spenders and lenders. These novels record the trauma of crunch and the drama of crunch experienced during the span between 2007 and 2012. The writers under scrutiny showcase accessible contexts and intelligible representations of seemingly unrepresented events; they foster new communities of understanding and reframing the period of economic freedom preceding the crunch.

John Lanchester, a British novelist portrays the modern financescapes as his characters unveil the veneer of society through social, geographical and economic mobility. His characters visit an array of social, economic and cultural institutes that undergo a greater alteration during the phase of crunch. Sebastian Faulks, another British novelist articulates the bank crisis, financial crunch and their impact on human relations. Robert Harris is also a British novelist who portrays the technologically advanced world with ultra rich people in the modern times whose stance towards everything changes during the era of crunch. Adam Haslett is an American novelist who explores the changing human relationships with the excessive use of money and technology. His works exhibit troubled human relationships during the time of technological advancements and financial crunch.

The relevance of the proposed research is that it tries to examine the novels of crunch writers as the cultural records that negotiate identities and mark the interstices of family, culture, space, and location due to financial crunch. This study is also an attempt to scrutinize and compare the trajectories of finance, culture and identity in England and America during the crunch time. One of the common themes in the selected novels is financial crunch and the proposed study will examine how the protagonists deal with this aspect.

**Scope, Limitation and Delimitation of Study:**

The proposed research, as it analyses one novel of each writer—John Lanchester, Sebastian Faulks, Robert Harris, Adam Haslett, Paula Hawkins and Sabin Willett – is really substantial. As the analysis proposes to deploy tools and methods of crunch studies, cultural studies and trauma studies, it is also interdisciplinary in its scope. The research model used in the study is also of significant importance as it indicates the future directions of literary studies along the lines of crunch studies and financial analysis. It also has great academic and pedagogical significance as the research model can have impact on classroom discussions on fiction of other writers who have implicated financescapes and global capital flow.

Though the proposed research takes into account different aspects of crunch fiction with representative novel of each writer, it has the basic limitations of random sampling. These novels need not represent the entire range of crunch fiction writers. However, such a selection is a necessity to define the corpus of primary data in humanities research.

The selected novels of John Lanchester, Sebastian Faulks, Robert Harris, Adam Haslett, Paula Hawkins and Sabin Willett can also be analysed using critical and analytical practices such as Migration studies and Marxist Criticism. Since these methods do not figure in the purview of the proposed research, they are left as scope for further research.

The topic of the proposed research is **"Intersection of Human Relations and Economic Meltdown: A Study of Select British and American Crunch Fiction".** By selecting one representative text of each selected writer, the researcher intends to consider the following literary works of the selected Crunch fiction for the present research:

A] Sebastian Faulks: ***A Week in December*** (2009)

B] Hawkins, Paula: ***Confessions of a Reluctant Recessionista*** (2009)

C] Harris, Robert: ***The Fear Index*** (2011)

D] John Lanchester: ***Capital*** (2012)

E] Willett, Sabin: ***Present Value*** (2003)

F] Haslett, Adam: ***Union Atlantic*** (2010)

**Hypothesis:**

The narratives of the selected British and American novelists project trajectories of human relations during financial crunch.

**Aims and Objectives of the Study:**

The proposed research work **"Intersection of Human Relations and Economic Meltdown: A Study of Select British and American Crunch Fiction"** aims to make a comprehensive inquiry of space, trauma and human relations in the select fiction of crunch writers. These writers voice the trauma of their characters during economic meltdown through the problems of space, economic prosperity, loss, recession, financial crisis and frustration in their writing. The objectives of the proposed research, therefore, are as follows. The proposed study has the following objectives:

1. To analyze the selected novels of John Lanchester, Sebastian Faulks, Robert Harris, Adam Haslett, Paula Hawkins and Sabin Willett and to highlight the interplay of familial, economic, and cultural aspects of lives depicted in them.
2. To identify their engagements with market, money and financial capital.
3. To consider these novels as financial records and to identify the trajectories of changing human relations in them.
4. To theorize crunch fiction and to identify its characteristic features.
5. To examine the impact of financial crunch, economic fluctuations, and the changing man-woman relationships in their narratives.
6. To apply the tenets of crunch literature, a contemporary critical tool, in the analysis and explorations of family, society and culture in the selected works of the crunch fiction.

**Research Methodology:**

The proposed study would apply the methodology of analytical research. The novels John Lanchester, Sebastian Faulks, Robert Harris, Adam Haslett, Paula Hawkins and Sabin Willett would be scrutinized using a theoretical framework drawn from crunch studies, trauma studies and spatial humanities to make some interpretations and draw certain inferences. The study would focus on intense analysis of characters and how they represent and negotiate space, place and gender.

The research method employed in this study is of humanities research in which human experiences rather than quantitative data will be in focus. The selected novels are considered as records of human experiences and the study proposes to uncover new layers of their meanings.

The method of data collection comprises library resources, on-line resources and access to journals on crunch literature. Electronic data banks such as ProQuest and JSTOR would also be accessed.

1. American Library, Bandra-Kurla Compex, Mumbai
2. Asiatic Library, Mumbai
3. Barr. Balasaheb Khardekar Library, Shivaji university, kolhapur
4. Barr. Jayakar Library, Pune University, Pune.
5. British Council Library, Mumbai
6. British Council Library, Pune

**Significance of the Study:**

The crunch writers delve deep into the problems of economic clash, financial conflicts and stress in individuals as well as community. Their characters often times epitomize the collective consciousness of financial meltdown. Hence, the literature of crunch, in other words, chronicles the financial crunch in the post 9/11 era. The financial crunch and economic meltdown of the modern Western society are so deeply engraved in the minds of the characters that they always feel trauma, frustration and dislocatedness. This notion is very strong with the characters in the narratives of crunch fiction writers. Psychological trauma is evident in their personalities and characters while dealing with human relations.

Crunch fiction underlines the notion of space as the characters deliberate financescapes and the trajectories of the shift in space and spatial markers due to the fluctuations in market. These spatial markers change the identities of the characters and so also human relationships. Similarly, the resultant trauma triggers strain in human ties. Economic meltdown in the early decades of the twenty-first century, thus, becomes a common thread in the narratives of the select crunch fiction writers.

Changing human relations are prominently evident in the itineraries of the crunch writers as they chronicle their lived experiences through their characters. Subsequently, these writing are psychological and autobiographical to a greater extent as the writers experience and undergo the experiences. The writings of creative writers like John Lanchester, Sebastian Faulks, Robert Harris, Paula Hawkins, Sabin Willett and Adam Haslett opened new vistas in the modern fiction. So far as crunch writers and their works are concerned, they make a vivid impression as they trigger economic, social, psychological and emotional trauma of their subjects both at a micro and macro level. The selected authors interrogate the capacity of contemporary genre writing to represent a new millennial crisis of credit and understand its legacy for contemporary society. Using writings not as a form of imaginative escape from the chaotic and confusing reality facing global economic systems, but as an exercise in critical understanding and reframing, they suggest that contemporary writings can be relevant and revealing in their social and political purpose.

Academicians like Kety Shaw and Jonathan Safran Foer are engaged in uncovering the trauma of the characters in the narratives of crunch writers. They articulate the multiple issues like space, finance, psychological trauma and human relationships in the era of economic meltdown as evident in the fiction of crunch writers. These scholars explore space,

shift in space, trauma and the changing human relations in the novels of crunch writers. The fiction of John Lanchester, Sebastian Faulks, Robert Harris, Adam Haslett, Paula Hawkins and Sabin Willett showcases these tenets in their writings.

In the era of Postglobalization an array of financial, social, domestic, spatial and psychological problems circumambulate the modern man which are poignantly portrayed in the select fiction of crunch writers, the acclaimed crunch writers selected for the study are John Lanchester, Sebastian Faulks, Robert Harris, Paula Hawkins, Sabin Willett and Adam Haslett.

**Biographical Sketches of the Writers:**

1) **Sebastian Faulks** (b. 1953) is a British novelist, journalist and broadcaster. He is best known for his historical novels set in France – *The Girl at the Lion d'Or*, *Birdsong* (1989) and *Charlotte Gray*(1993). He has also published novels with a contemporary setting, most recently *A Week in December* (2009), and a James Bond continuation novel, *Devil May Care* (2008), as well as a continuation of P.G. Wodehouse's Jeeves series, *Jeeves and the Wedding Bells* (2013). His narratives uncover the veneer of economically advanced society. He chronicles the financial trauma in English society after the terroristic attack of 9/11.

2) **Paula Hawkins** (b. 1972) is a Zimbabwe-born British author wrote under the pen name Amy Silver, best known for her best-selling psychological thriller novel *The Girl on the Train* (2015). She studied politics and economics at Oxford, and worked as a personal finance journalist for *The Times*. Her first novel, *Confessions of a Reluctant Recessionista* touches the issues of finance and financial crunch resulting into the stress in familial relationships.

3) **Robert Harris** (b.1957) is an English novelist and a former journalist and BBC television reporter. Although he began his career in non-fiction, his fame rests upon his works of historical fiction. Beginning with the best-seller *Fatherland*, (1992), *Enigma* (1995), *Archangel* (1998), *Pompeii* (2003), *Imperium* (2006,) *The Ghost* (2007) *Lustrum* (2009), *The Fear Index* (2011), *An Office and a Spy* (2013), *Dictator* (2015), *Conclave* (2016) and *Munich* (2017) Harris focused on events surrounding the Second World War, followed by works set in ancient Rome. His most

recent works centre on contemporary history. His narratives portray the millennial society, its social, financial and psychological stress.

4) **John Lanchester** (b. 1962) John Lanchester was born in Hamburg in 1962. He has worked as a football reporter, obituary writer, book editor, restaurant critic, and deputy editor of the *London Review of Books*, where he is a contributing editor. He is a regular contributor to the *New Yorker*. He has written four novels, *The Debt to Pleasure* (1996), *Mr Phillips* (2000), *Fragrant Harbour* (2002) and *Capital* (2012) These writings are about the global financial crisis. His books have won the Hawthornden Prize, the Whitbread First Novel Prize, E.M Forster Award, and the Premi Llibreter. Also, he was longlisted for the prestigious Booker Prize. Further, his writings have been translated into twenty-five languages. His novel, *Capital* deals primarily with the issues of economic meltdown and its impact on human relations.

**5)** **Adam Haslett** (b, 1970) is an American fiction writer His first book, a collection of short stories entitled *You Are Not a Stranger Here*, (2002) that brought him the 2002 National Book Award and the prestigious Pulitzer Prize in 2003. It was also named one of the five best books of the year by *Time*. His novel Union Atlantic (2010) deals with the trauma and drama of crunch. His book *Imagine Me Gone* (2016) was enlisted in Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Fiction. The characters of Haslett express the trauma of financial meltdown.

**6)** **Sabin Willett** (b. 1957) was born in America in 1957. He is an American lawyer and novelist. He graduated from Harvard and Harvard Law School and lives outside Boston. He has written three novels, *The Deal* (1996), *The Betrayal* (1998) and *Present Value* (2003). The novel *Present Value* is an ambitious satire of post 9/11America and about the change in human values as the financial positions alter in the market.

**An Overview of the Relevant Literature:**

Crunch novelist have been studied and theorized in certain scholarly articles and research documents. Most of these studies are along the lines of Postcolonialism and Psychoanalysis. A full-length research on crunch fiction along the thematic strands of culture,

social class, trauma and space is relatively new. The researcher, however, would like to acknowledge the works that have appeared on this area of study.

Most of the studies available on John Lanchester, Sebastian Faulks, Robert Harris, Adam Haslett, Paula Hawkins and Sabin Willett are books, book reviews and journal articles. Katy Shaw's resourceful article titled, "'Capital' City: London, Contemporary British Fiction and the Credit Crunch" articulates the socio-economic cross sections in British society as evident in Faulks' *A Week in December* (2009) and John Lanchester's *Capital* (2012). The article comments upon the financial crunch experienced by the protagonists in these narratives. Katy Shaw's resourceful book entitled, *Crunch Lit* comments upon the leading contemporary crunch literary narratives where socio-economic crisis becomes a common theme of the writings. Her book encompasses both British and American writers who deal extensively with economic meltdown.

Jonathan Safran Foer's research document, "Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close" examines the crunch writers who sketch the post 9/11 world in their narratives. It scrutinizes how different man-made calamities triggered global economic crisis that accelerated after 2001, propelled by bad mortgages, bad financial instruments, bad regulations and bad faith.

However, a full-fledged research on crunch fiction along the axis of socio-economic perspective and financescape is relatively new. The proposed study will make a substantial addition to crunch studies.

**Chapter-Scheme of the Proposed Study:**

The tentative chapter scheme of the proposed research will be as follows:

The proposed research will have a structure of five chapters. The **first chapter** will deal with Introduction highlighting the research objectives, scope, limitation and delimitation of study, hypothesis, research methodology used, significance of the study. It will also provide a survey of contemporary fiction by crunch writers, by locating John Lanchester, Sebastian Faulks, Robert Harris, Adam Haslett, Paula Hawkins and Sabin Willett in its continuum.

The **second chapter** will discuss the Theoretical Framework of the proposed study. It will theorize financial crunch and explore variant tenets of economic crunch literature.

Further, the chapter will critique a review of critical writings-books, reviews and research papers on crunch fiction writers and crunch literature.

The **third chapter** will be devoted to analyse the selected texts of British crunch novelists- Lanchester, Sebastian Faulks, Robert Harris and Paula Hawkins. The chapter will attempt to trace multiple contemporary financial, social and familial issues in British society during the first decade of twenty-first century. It will deal with the financial crisis, immigration, Islamic extremism, man-woman relationships and property prices. This chapter will analyse financial crunch, trauma and human relationships. The chapter will also examine the ways in which Lanchester, Sebastian Faulks, Robert Harris and Paula Hawkins dismantle and construct financial trauma and human relations in their narratives.

The **fourth chapter** will trace the selected novels of American crunch fiction writers- Adam Haslett and Sabin Willett. The chapter will explicate the socio-economic traumatic issues like recession, a sense of trying to survive in a world of madness and the altering human relationships. Further, it will highlight issues such as consumerism, greed and financial unrest in American society and how they configure in the selected narratives of Adam Haslett and Sabin Willett.

The **fifth chapter** will draw inferences and conclusions on the basis of the analysis carried out in the previous chapters. This chapter enlists the common and different varieties of trauma and socio-economic issues that pop up due to crunch as evident in the works of John Lanchester, Sebastian Faulks, Robert Harris, Adam Haslett, Paula Hawkins and Sabin Willett. Further the chapter reasserts the problematics of trauma in human relations and financial crunch implicated in the texts of these writers. The ideas such as human relations, identity and financial crunch are explored in this chapter. It will also explain the new ways of understanding novels with an attention on crunch.

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